



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

January 31, 1995

Mr. Albert Sierra
Executive Director
Housing Authority
City of San Marcos
1201 Thorpe Lane
San Marcos, Texas 78666

OR94-047

Dear Mr. Sierra:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Open Records Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. You assert that the requested information is excepted from required public disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 24546.

The Open Records Act imposes a duty on governmental bodies seeking an open records decision pursuant to section 552.301 to submit that request to the attorney general within ten days after the governmental body's receipt of the request for information. The time limitation found in section 552.301 is an express legislative recognition of the importance of having public information produced in a timely fashion. *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.--Austin 1990, no writ). When a request for an open records decision is not made within the time period prescribed by section 552.301, the requested information is presumed to be public. See Gov't Code § 552.302. This presumption of openness can only be overcome by a compelling demonstration that the information should not be made public. See, e.g., Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (presumption of openness overcome by a showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests).

We realize that the short time frame prescribed by section 552.301 may occasionally impose a substantial burden on governmental bodies seeking to comply with the act. Accordingly, when we receive an otherwise timely request for an open records decision that lacks some information necessary for us to make a determination, it has been our policy to give the governmental body an opportunity to complete the request.

On February 23, 1994, we asked you for copies of the records at issue, your arguments for withholding the documents, and a copy for the request for information that you received. To date we have not received the requested copies or your brief.

The Open Records Act places on the custodian of public records the burden of establishing that records are excepted from public disclosure. Attorney General Opinion H-436 (1974). Your request for an open records decision remains incomplete. Without the information requested from you, this office is unable to evaluate the exception you raised. Consequently, we find that you have not met your burden under sections 552.301 - .303 of the act and that the information is presumed to be public.

In the absence of a demonstration that the information is confidential by law or that other compelling reasons exist as to why the information should not be made public, you must release the information.¹ See also Gov't Code § 552.352 (the distribution of confidential information is a criminal offense). If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Rebecca L. Payne
Section Chief
Open Government Section

RLP/sbm

Ref.: ID# 24546

¹ Please note that this office has previously held that because the public has a legitimate interest in knowing who owes money to government-run utilities, utility bill ledgers are not confidential under common law privacy. Open Records Decision No. 443 (1986). See also Open Records Decision No. 480 (1987).